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PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE
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ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
(HABITAT II)
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Item 4 of the provisional agenda
Preparations the regional and global levels

Note by the secretariat

Annexed herewith is the Declaration by African Ministers responsible for human settlements on the preparatory process to the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) adopted at their meeting on 30 March 1994 in Nairobi.

GE.94-01269

DECLARATION BY AFRICAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR HUMAN SETTLEMENTS ON THE PREPARATORY PROCESS TO THE SECOND UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (HABITAT II)

We, the Ministers responsible for Human Settlements in Countries of the Africa Region, meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, on the 30th day of March 1994 to consult, deliberate on and review collective strategy for effective African participation in the Preparatory Process of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II);

Taking into account the recommendations of Habitat I: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, Vancouver Canada 1976 and having assessed the need to evaluate the impacts of its recommendations for national and international actions and the activities undertaken so far in this respect;

Taking also into account the Programme of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYSH) 1982-1987 which had the objectives of improving the shelter and neighbourhoods of some of the poor by 1987 and demonstrating also by 1987, ways of improving the shelter and neighbourhoods of all the poor by the Year 2000;

Further taking into account the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 (GSS) whose main objective was to facilitate access to adequate shelter for all by the Year 2000 through "enabling strategies";

Having reviewed the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) i.e Agenda 21, particularly as it relates to human settlements (Chapter 7) which has the objective of improving the social, economic and environmental quality of human settlements and the living and working environments of all people, in particular, the urban and rural poor;

Having reviewed human settlements conditions in the Africa Region and noted the most critical challenges, the issues and features present, namely:

(i) the unprecedented rapid urbanization taking place in countries of the region and the challenge of more effectively and productively managing this phenomenon;

(ii) the fact that basic needs of the rural areas, where the majority of the people live, have not been sufficiently taken into account, thus accelerating migration into cities resulting into increasing unsustainability of the rural economy;

(iii) shelter inadequacy in the cities, resulting in increasing homelessness overcrowding and alarming growth of unplanned and unserviced neighbourhoods, thus contributing to the deterioration of the urban environment;

(iv) the deterioration of the fabrics of ancient urban centres resulting in the loss of historical and cultural heritage in human settlements;

(v) the inadequacy and lack of maintenance of urban infrastructure (road network, storm water, drainage water supplies, sanitation electricity, telephone, and economic, social and cultural facilities (markets, health and education centres) which is especially critical in the poor neighbourhood of cities;

(vi) disruption and destruction of habitat arising from both natural and man-made disasters (drought, desertification, political and social tensions, wars and other civil conflicts within and between states etc) resulting in forced migrations and massive refugee population movements;

(vii) concentration of developments and facilities in few, often primate cities which contribute to attracting migration to these places and putting pressure on resources, basic services and facilities.

(viii) the predominant role of central authority on local authorities in most countries, inadequate resources and management capacity on the part of the local authorities and the weak participation at community level in the decision-making process in most aspects of human settlements, planning and development;

(ix) inadequate capacity building and research institutions in Africa in the area of human settlements;

(x) the high cost of building materials and equipment and worsening affordability problems;

(xi) the negative impacts of the global economic crisis on human settlements in Africa as well as the constraining effects of the structural adjustment programmes and increasing external debt burdens;

Welcoming the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 47/180, convening the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, with a view to, among others, arresting, in the long term, the deterioration of global human settlements conditions and ultimately creating the conditions for achieving improvements in the living environment of all people on a sustainable basis, with special attention to the needs and contributions of women and vulnerable social groups.

Reiterating OAU Council of Ministers Resolution CM/Res.1469 (LVIII) urging African Member States and Regional Organizations to participate actively in the preparatory activities of the Conference, with a view to ensuring that the collective views of the African continent are reflected in the Conference itself and in its outcome.

1. We fully endorse the two major themes for the Habitat II Conference as reflecting basic human settlements concerns of the Africa Region, namely:

   (i) Sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world and
   (ii) Adequate shelter for All.

2. Whilst aware and accepting that human settlements issues world-wide must be perceived in the context of sustainable development, we emphasize that human settlements is a priority sector and that Africa should focus mainly on priority areas that are of critical relevance to the region. We need to integrate human settlement development in overall national development planning.

3. We stress that Human Settlements should be seen as an important contributor to economic growth and development, and not only as a social sector. Consequently it should receive adequate public sector investment and incentives provided to attract private participation.

4. We stress that human settlements policies and programmes in Africa should simultaneously address the needs of both urban and rural areas. In doing so, appropriate linkages should be promoted between the cities and rural areas with a view to achieving balanced development.

5. We are aware that the issues of land, shelter and infrastructure are of paramount importance and that programmes should be formulated to ensure accessibility by the majority of the population especially the poor, women and the increasing number of displaced persons.

6. We stress the necessity of developing supportive appropriate institutions for the sustenance of human settlements in the region. Such institutions should address the development of land use planning and management, training of human resources, the promotion of research and technologies with special attention to the exploitation of local building materials, the development of accessible financial and legal mechanisms, and procedures for monitoring and evaluation of human settlements programmes and projects.

7. We emphasize the importance of establishing more positive relationships between central and local government authorities, and to translate such measures into effective decentralization of responsibilities and resources. We also underscore the need for creating an enabling environment for the development and growth of the private sector, community based organizations and non-governmental organizations in the development of human settlements.

8. We underscore the importance of putting in place necessary mechanisms for the preparation of country programmes. Such programmes could include assessment of human settlements achievements and constraints since Habitat I.

9. We commit ourselves and also call upon the international community to address seriously the issues of environmentally sustainable human settlements development in a rapidly urbanizing world.

10. We will also endeavour to ensure proper consultation and co-ordination at sub-regional, national and regional levels, in order to maximize the sharing of experiences and establishing appropriate networks. In this regard we call upon relevant regional institution such as OAU, ECA, ADB, as well as sub-regional economic organizations and groups to be involved and support the process.

11. We call for additional support to UNCHS (Habitat) to enable it continue preparations for Habitat II.

12. We urge the UNCHS (Habitat) in collaboration with OAU and ECA to continue mobilizing resources and supporting the preparatory process at National, sub-regional and regional levels by providing adequate and timely information, as well as resources.

13. We call on Africa's development partners to create the international economic environment which is conducive to the development of human settlements in Africa. We stress that given increasing inter-dependence and interaction in the world community, the deterioration of human settlements in Africa would negatively impact on other regions.

14. We commend the Under-Secretary General for Habitat, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA and the Secretary General of OAU, for the initiative they have taken to organize this meeting thus enabling a fruitful exchange of views and experiences among African countries.